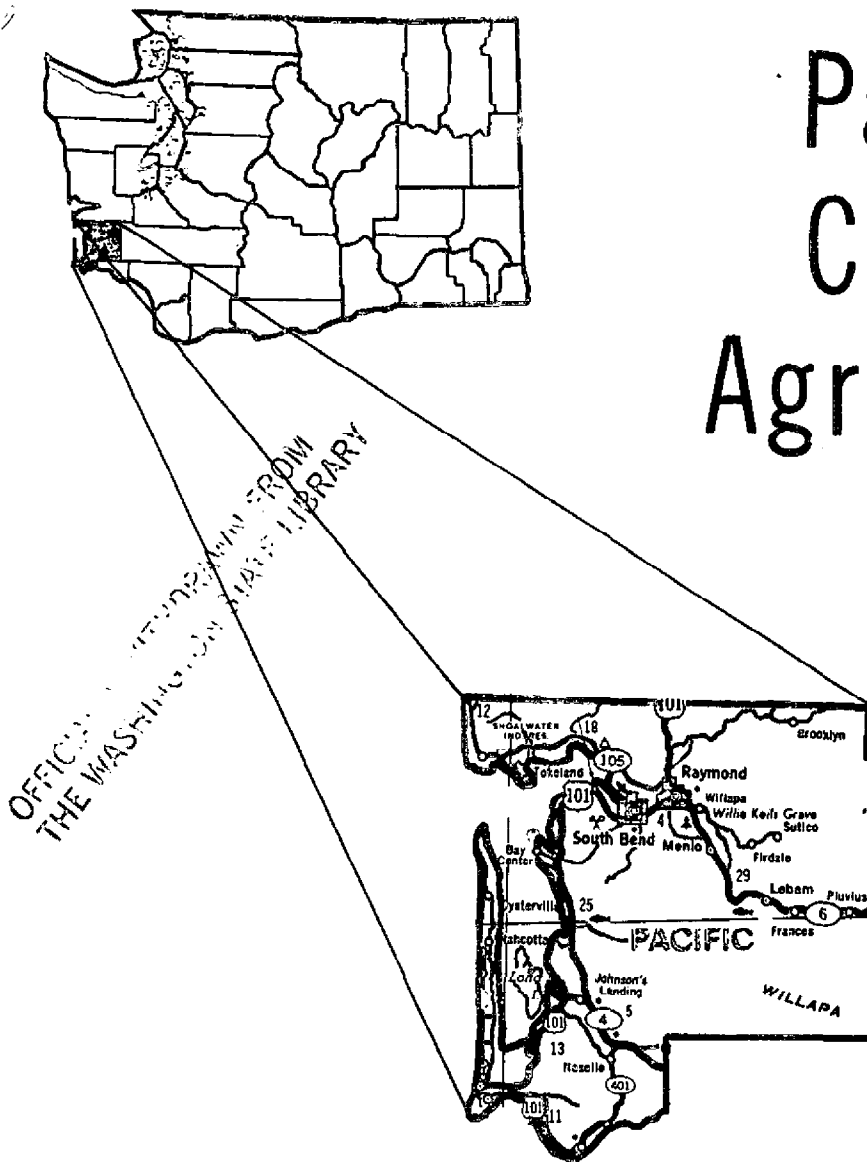


Pacific County Agriculture



COUNTY AGRICULTURAL DATA SERIES

STATE OF WASHINGTON

1968 Revision

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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FOREWORD

This handbook on the agriculture of Pacific County is the third edition of a series giving background and statistical characteristics of agriculture in each of Washington's thirty-nine counties. Initiated in 1956, the series was revised to include data published in the 1959 Census. This present edition has been expanded and reflects the results of the 1964 Census of Agriculture. Statistics and conclusions of the Washington Conservation Needs Committee have been included as relevant to agricultural resource allocation.

The handbooks are expected to serve a variety of needs which may not be confined to the agricultural industries. As a State, Washington is in the midst of rapid and often unexpected change. Our land and water resources are valuable, and limited, assets which must accommodate the diverse needs of growing numbers of people both within and outside the State. Knowledge of our agriculture, then, accords a background of understanding both useful and necessary for many pursuits and problems. For the man engaged in producing and marketing farm products it is hoped these studies will prove convenient and useful.

Regular reports by farmers and others to the Washington Crop and Livestock Reporting Service help to make these publications possible. The present edition was prepared by Pierce A. Bahnsen, Research Analyst, with the Washington Department of Agriculture under the general direction of Emery C. Wilcox, Statistician-in-Charge of the Washington office of the Statistical Reporting Service. Bernice Hollyoak typed the material which was mimeographed and assembled by the clerical staff.

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PART I

HISTORY OF PACIFIC COUNTY

Introduction

Pacific County is a land of tidewater plains, shoals, bays and low-lying hills situated in the southwesternmost corner of Washington. Facing the Pacific Ocean on the west, the county borders the estuary of the Columbia River on the south. History and economic development have been closely related to lumbering and fishing, and more recently to recreation and specialized industries such as shellfish culture, cranberry growing, and dairying.

With an area of approximately 592,000 acres, the county ranks thirtieth in size among the thirty-nine Washington counties. According to the Census of Agriculture, about 8 percent of the county land area, or 49,504 acres, was in farms in 1964. Of this 8,220 acres was harvested cropland. The average farm contained 110 acres of land. The Census showed that agricultural products sold by farmers were valued at nearly \$2,000,000. Dairying was the most important source of farm income and cranberries were the most valuable cash crop. Of 450 farms in the county in 1964, 110 of them marketed cranberries, while 57 farms sold milk or cream.

History

The coastline of southwestern Washington was explored by several early ships masters among them the American Robert Gray and his ship the "Columbia Rediviva." His discoveries of Grays Harbor and the Columbia River in the late spring of 1792 established the United States as a principal claimant to the northwest country. In the fall of 1805 the Lewis and Clark Expedition, dispatched by Thomas Jefferson, reached the mouth of the Columbia. Thanksgiving dinner that year included cranberry sauce made from wild berries furnished by the Chinook Indian women. During the winter the tide-water areas to the north where the coastal Indians lived by fishing and clam digging were investigated by the explorers.

In the spring of 1811, the ship "Tonquin" of John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company arrived in the Columbia estuary to establish a trading post. The difficult task of clearing land was started but, poorly led and organized, the Astoria venture failed. In 1813 the post was taken over by the Canadian Northwest Company and renamed Fort George. Land clearing continued and a few crops were grown to augment the diet of the small staff. But the area was not suited to agriculture, and wolves frequently made off with the pigs which the "Tonquin" had landed.

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A few years later the Canadian Northwest Company assets became part of the vast fur empire of the Hudson's Bay Company. The region north of the Columbia River lay within the Columbia Department which was headquartered at Fort Vancouver. Homesteading for agricultural purposes by persons not associated with the Company was discouraged. Disputed jurisdiction of these lands by the United States and Great Britain was resolved finally by the Treaty of 1846 whereby Great Britain relinquished her claims and the entire Oregon country became American. The way was now open to settlement.

Attracted by opportunities in lumbering and fishing, settlers began arriving on the Columbia River and Willapa Bay shores. Gold had been discovered in California, and the rush of people to the coast and the building of San Francisco opened markets for timber, piling and fish. Oysters were in vogue at this time, and the vast oyster beds in the southern arm of Willapa Bay were available for harvesting. Exports soon reached 50,000 baskets annually and brought \$7.00 a basket in the San Francisco markets. With the best natural harbor north of San Francisco Bay itself, the advantages of geography favored the Willapa Bay settlers.

By 1850 a few hundred settlers were fishing and logging the Bay region. Pacific County was established in 1851 by the Oregon Territorial Legislature, the third county to be created in the present Washington area. Oysterville on North Beach peninsula was the principal settlement and became the first county seat. In 1852 fishermen from Oysterville attended the convention at Monticello near present day Longview to petition Congress to create a new Territory north of the Columbia. Before the message reached Congress, President Fillmore signed the Act creating Washington Territory on March 2, 1853. Later, in 1892, when the center of population had shifted to the Willapa Valley, the county seat was moved to South Bend.

Published records of pioneer settlement are few. Several men took claims in the Willapa Valley under the Donation Land Act of 1852 which granted 320 acres to a single man or 640 acres to a married couple. Samuel Woodward homesteaded a claim at the mouth of the Willapa River in 1852 and planted garden vegetables and a fruit orchard. Neighboring homesteaders were William Cushing, Solomon Soule, Henry Whitcomb and Captain Gardner. In the present Raymond district, Captain John Vail took a donation claim. In 1855 the Bethel Religious Colony of settlers from Missouri arrived to take up land on the prairies of the upper Willapa Valley. The Bethelites, led by Christian Giesy, Michael Schaffer and Adam Knight, started general and livestock farming in this area.

The Naselle River Valley in southern Pacific County was home-steaded in the early 1850's. Among the first to file on donation claims were H. K. Stevens, James Hinkley and J. S. Van Cleave. In the 1870's, Henry Smith, Patrick O'Connor, Charles Holm and William Rommerman established farms. Finnish immigrants led by Jacob Pakenen arrived in 1879 and combined agriculture with fishing and logging.

Agriculture in the Willapa and Naselle River valleys was discouraged by the forests, a damp climate, and isolation from markets. Logging and fishing became the chief economic activities of the region. Logs and piling were floated to Willapa Bay and the Columbia estuary for shipping to California. Salmon barreling plants, oyster packing, and canneries were built at tidewater ports. Port facilities were improved at South Bend and Raymond.

In 1895 the Northern Pacific Railway extended its lines to South Bend from Centralia thereby linking the county with the interior population centers on Puget Sound. By 1900, a thriving lumbering and fishing industry existed at South Bend, Raymond, Ilwaco, Nahcotta and Oysterville. A county population of 6,000 persons, concentrated principally in the lumber port towns of South Bend and Raymond, provided a ready market for fresh vegetables, poultry and dairy products. Oxen and horses used in lumbering required hay and grain, while fishing and cargo vessels offered additional sources of cash income for the pioneer farmer. At the peak of lumber production in 1925, there were 17 lumber mills operating in Pacific County with an annual production of 281,000,000 board feet.

Development of Pacific County's cranberry industry started in 1880 when Anthony Chabot, a native of Quebec who had become wealthy in San Francisco engineering ventures, became interested in cranberry growing. Although the Chinook Indians had harvested berries for drying, and wild cranberries had been exported to San Francisco as early as 1847, his was the first commercial enterprise. In 1881 he purchased 1,600 acres of government land and pioneered a planting of 35 acres at Seaview near present Long Beach. Several hundred thousand vines were brought in from Massachusetts. For a time the Chabot plantings thrived and production reached 7,500 barrels. Indian and Chinese laborers helped in the difficult task of preparing the bogs. But pests and scales attacked the vines, labor problems developed, and the Chabot bog went to weeds.

Another pioneer, Chris Hansen, had planted two acres in the meantime and for many years was the only producer on the peninsula. Others tried but gave up. Between 1909 and 1916, however, cranberry growing increased rapidly to 600 acres in the Long Beach district.

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About 1912 cranberries were introduced by Ed Benn in the Tokeland and Grayland districts of northern Pacific County. Finnish settlers expanded the bog area. In 1923 the State College of Washington established the Cranberry-Blueberry Experiment Station at Long Beach to provide technical assistance. Growers in the area affiliated with a national marketing cooperative, the National Cranberry Growers Association. Later a cannery was established at Markham in neighboring Grays Harbor County. By 1957 the Washington cranberry industry was well-established with a national market for a growing line of cranberry products.

General and dairy farming developed from 1895 to 1920 in the Willapa and Naselle Valleys. With lowland forests removed, livestock, dairying and poultry farms were established on the logged-over lands. Lumber companies sold cut-over land at rates of less than \$10 an acre. Many small farms of 20 to 40 acres were developed on a part-time basis on cut-over lands. The moist climate and hilly terrain of the interior proved suitable for dairying. Cooperative dairy plants and condenseries in the Chehalis and the Grays River areas established milk truck routes into the county as small dairy farms increased. Dairymen participated in the Lewis-Pacific Dairymen's and Lower Columbia Cooperative Dairy Association.

Fisheries have long been a stable industry in the economy of Pacific County. The towns of Nahcotta and Oysterville, on the Long Beach peninsula are leaders in the Pacific Coast oyster industry. Ilwaco bases a North Pacific fishing fleet, canneries have been established, and the town has become the trade center of the peninsular district of the county.

Although the Pacific shores had long attracted vacationers from the interior, the construction of modern highways spurred expansion of the recreational industries. Ocean beach, salt water fishing, and other facilities have been established at Ocean Park, Long Beach, Seaview, Klipsan Beach and Ilwaco. Vacation homes have become popular. Completion of the Astoria Bridge across the Columbia River has encouraged further development of the county's recreational industries.